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Written statement* submitted by the Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Briefing on the situation in Arakan and developments in Naypyitaw

Amidst the political and humanitarian crises faced by Rohingya people in Arakan, a powerful tropical cyclone had made its landfall in Arakan, setting off a new wave of humanitarian crises in several townships in the Arakan state. On the political side, the date for the General Election in Myanmar is set for 8 November, 2015. While the ruling military's USDP-dominated Government continues to deny the basic rights and citizenship of Rohingya and reject their ethnic identity, it has renewed its old strategy—reminiscent to what USDP did in the 2010 General Election— to secure the votes from Rohingya. Simultaneously, the main opposition party of the Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, reportedly has also taken dramatic steps against Muslims in Myanmar. Currently, the Rohingya are not in the voters' list issued by the Government.

Cyclone devastation at IDP camps and Rohingya villages

The powerful tropical cyclone, Komen, made its landfall in Northern Arakan state on 31 July, 2015, causing death and extensive damage to homes and properties due to high wind, seawater surge, and extensive flooding (Appendix photos). The areas worst hit by the storm in the Rakhine state are reportedly the townships of Minbya, Mrauk-U, Kyauktaw, Ann, Maungdaw, and Buthidaung, where a total of 463 villages have been submerged, three have been washed away, and the IDP camps in Arakan State are currently under water. Many quarters and villages in Maungdaw North, including Faizi, Khanry, Maungni, were partly submerged (by over six feet of water at some locations). The death of at least 18 Rohingya persons has been reported from various townships, and a number of individuals are unaccounted for. According to the reports from Maungdaw, which is a highly vulnerable coastal town, Myanmar Government officials have evacuated Buddhist Rakhine from the low-lying areas to highland in Maungdaw East a day before the landfall of the storm. Urgent relief supplies from the Government of Myanmar for the Buddhist Rakhine residents reportedly began to arrive at the Buddhist Rakhine shelter areas, according to eyewitnesses. The UN and International NGOs are reportedly surveying the areas and assessing the damage. Relief supplies for the Rohingya from international relief groups or from the Government of Myanmar have not arrived to date, according to sources in Arakan. Currently, Rohingya communities in various townships are providing shelters to the Rohingya families that have lost their homes. The continuous torrential monsoon rain is reportedly worsening the situation. Immediate humanitarian assistance is needed for the people affected by the storm.

The verification process and green card/pink card

Following the major outbreaks of violence against the Rohingya and Myanmar Muslims in 2012 and 2013 by the extremist Buddhists mobs organized by the "969" terror group and largely backed by the Myanmar police, Lon Htein, and BGP (formerly NASKA) forces, the situation in Arakan state has not improved. Over 140,000 Rohingya in IDP camps in Arakan are increasingly facing shortage of life-sustaining relief supplies, and the situation is dire at the peak of tropical monsoon and devastation by cycle, Komen.

As the General Election Day is rapidly approaching, the ruling Military's USDP has resumed its manipulation strategy against Rohingya. In July 2015, the Government of Myanmar introduced a new policy of selectively granting Green cards and Pink cards to Rohingya through a "Verification" process, which is a highly controversial policy developed by the Government quite some time ago. During the past two years, the Government has attempted to use this "Verification" scheme as a tool to prevent Rohingya IDPs from returning to their homes in various townships in Arakan. The attempts failed in the past due to non-cooperation by Rohingya, despite extensive physical abuse and arrests of Rohingya for their refusal to cooperate. After a relative lull for several weeks, the Government has reinvigorated the "Verification" process as another attempt to lure Rohingya with voting rights – and to secure the votes from Rohingya. This time the Government has proposed two types of cards for Rohingya:

The Green card. The Green card will be issued to Rohingya following the Verification process, forcing Rohingya to write "Bengali" in the form. The Government officials are pressuring Rohingya to accept the Verification and Green card to pave the way for naturalization. According to the 1982 Citizenship law instituted by the former military dictatorship, the 'Naturalized Citizens" are Class III Citizens with limited rights and the citizenship can be revoked if deemed necessary by Myanmar officials. However, the Class III citizens will be eligible to vote in the 2015 General Election. According to sources on the ground in Arakan, over 90% of Rohingya adults (over the age of 18 - the voting age) will fall into the Class III category.

The Pink card: The Pink card holders are Class I citizens (Full Citizenship) in Myanmar. The Government has reportedly proposed Pink card for Rohingya who are still in possession of the former National Registration Card (NRC), known as Thone Kauk Sho, or any Rohingya person who can document that he/she is an offspring of an NRC holder. According to sources from Arakan, these are less thsn 10% of the Rohingya and their offspring that could potentially receive the Pink card.

However, there is a catch in the Government's proposal with the cards – that is the Rohingya must write "Bengali" in the Green and Pink cards.

Myanmar Government forces and officials are putting enormous pressure on Rohingya people in Arakan to accept the Green Card/Pink Card plan. Rohingya people are reportedly not cooperating due to the nature of the scheme. There have been reports of widespread physical abuse such as beating and kicking of Rohingya household heads. There have been also reports of arrests in Maungdaw South village tracks.

The key in either of the cards is the term "Bengali" which automatically denotes that the Rohingya are "Illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in Myanmar", as the former Military Dictatorship and the present Government has alleged. There is nothing new in this new proposal by the Government. Reinventing the wheel time and again will not produce any lasting solution in Arakan.

It should be noted that the confiscation of documents from Rohingya by the former military dictatorship and non-issuance of any document to Rohingya people for over a period of 50 years have rendered Rohingya people without evidence of birth, residency, or the National Registration Card (NRC). Therefore, a Rohingya man or woman who is 50 years old or younger, will face a tremendous challenge to produce a government-issued document/evidence of birth or residency.

Anti-muslim moves by Aung San Suu Kyi's "NLD" party

According to reports from Yangon and Naypyitaw, the Executive Committee of NLD has removed all the Muslim officials and candidates from the party in preparation for the upcoming General Election. The Muslim members and officials have been with NLD for several years – most of them since the inception of the party. The reports further indicate that NLD is also in the process of voiding the general party membership for Muslims in all of Myanmar.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We urge the government of Myanmar to deliver urgent assistance for the people, including Rohingya people, affected by the storm without any racial / religious / origin discrimination.
- We urge the government of Myanmar to stop selectively deciding who to grant Green cards or Pink cards among the Rohingya through the "Verification" scheme, which is a highly controversial policy developed by the Government.
- We urge the government of Myanmar to stop violence and mass killings against the Rohingya minority and consider the Rohingya people as part of the Myanmar people and allow them the nationality.

- We urge the Myanmar authorities to issue immediately the National Registration Card (NRC) to the Rohingya people, including information such as evidence of birth and residency

- MAARIJ calls upon the government of Myanmar to cancel its policy concerning the NLD party representing the Rohingya minority people in Myanmar.